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News Release - Pratt Tells Graduates to Explore the "Working Title" of Their Lives

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Illinois Wesleyan Celebrates 2012 Graduates

April 29, 2012

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – At the 162nd Commencement ceremony for Illinois Wesleyan University on Sunday, April 29, President Richard F. Wilson congratulated the 495 candidates for graduation, who were surrounded by family and friends at the Shirk Center.

"We gather to celebrate the potential you represent and the contributions that we know all of you will make in the future," Wilson told the Class of 2012. "I sincerely hope that you will remain loyal to Illinois Wesleyan and join more than 20,000 alumni who can be found doing great things all across this country and around the world."

George Vinyard '71, chair of the University's Board of Trustees, told the class, "You are going forth from here well prepared, both intellectually and morally, to fulfill all of the aspirations reflected in our motto," *Scientia et Sapientia*, or Knowledge and Wisdom. "As you pursue your life's goals and grow wiser... We hope that you will continue to think of this community as your extended family and as your home."

Vinyard and Wilson conferred an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree upon Awadagin Pratt. An educator, concert pianist and founder of the Dr. T.A.E.C. Pratt Music Foundation, Pratt delivered the Commencement address, "working title."

As the graduates explore the "working title" of their own lives, Pratt urged them "to know that thing that you love, whether it's a verb or a noun.

"Find and be true to what's inside of you, to what inspires you and to what you imagine," he said. "Then be completely invested in it and intense in the pursuit of the realization of your dreams."

Pratt noted that in his life he's tried to turn around the words of the William Butler Yeats poem, "The Second Coming." Paraphrasing Yeats, Pratt said, "I ask you, the Class of 2012, to live every day as I try to do: To be the best, however one defines it; to have all conviction and to be full of passionate intensity."

During the ceremony, Professor of Composition and Theory David Vayo was invested with the **Fern Rosetta Sherff Professorship in Music**, an endowed professorship established by the Sherff family in 1977. Endowed professorships honor faculty members who have distinguished themselves in terms of teaching, research and service.

Greg Shaw, professor of political science and the 2012 Student Senate Professor of the Year, told the graduates their futures hinge on their courage and creativity.

"I firmly believe the courageous habit of thinking big accounts for a large part of the difference between college graduates who merely survive, vs. those who change the world," Shaw said. "From here on out, it's going to be up to you to make your own opportunities and to have the courage and creativity to do big things with them."

Class President Kathryn Breisch said the education she and her classmates received at Illinois Wesleyan "is a rare gift," deserving an earnest thank you to their families, professors and support networks. "The education that you have helped us obtain has and will continue to shape who we are," she said.

"My fellow classmates... take your personal transformation out into the world to contribute, with knowledge and wisdom, to the world's transformation."

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